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F O R R E L E A S E

M A R C H 12, 1949

"THE WOMAN BROADCASTER MEETS TOMORROW'S CHALLENGE"

ADDRESS OF GEORGE JENNINGS, President of the ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION BY RADIO
and Director, RADIO COUNCIL - WBEZ, CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SIXTH ANNUAL CONVENTION, ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN BROADCASTERS - MARCH 12, 1949
Drake Hotel Chicago

I am not a woman broadcaster, nor a fortune teller. I am afraid I am much like my Grandfather Squeers. You remember my "Grandfather Squeers"?

"So remarkably deaf was my Grandfather Squeers
That he had to wear lightning-rods over his ears
To even hear thunder - and oftentimes then
He was forced to request it to thunder again."

But I am not alone in my deafness. The entire radio industry, both men and women, have been deaf to the thundering of the future; and not only have we requested it to "thunder again", we have practically forced it to thunder again! We have needed lightning-rod ears, or at least a bi-pole antenna, and we have worn ear-muffs. I am referring to the rising thunder of the listener who is leaving our radio audience faster than he is becoming a member of the television audience.

When the president of a great network can stand before a group and say he is of the opinion that radio is slipping program-wise, we might think something were wrong; when a survey, conducted by an organized group among its members, brings the opinion

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that there are only ten worthwhile programs for children aired in a certain area, we might think it was thundering; when, what in the past seemed to be sporadic outbreaks of pressure group dissatisfaction with radio, is snow-balling into a nationwide movement, we might think we had asked for it to thunder twice! For these things are happening. And it is no one's fault but ours - the men and women who are "broadcasters". We have alienated a large audience by refusing to listen to the complaints and complaints of our ultimate consumer, the listener. We have given them what they seemed to want, but what in reality was the easiest for us to produce or to sell to an agency or a sponsor; or, we have accepted what the sponsor and the agency have thought was good radio.

In many instances the local station has taken the easy way out. It has released its network programs and sold local time on news or recorded or transcribed programs. I suggest then as the first challenge of the future, the holding and getting back of an audience which is slipping away. This can be done - the easiest way I think of is through better local programming. What an enviable position you local women broadcasters are in! There isn't a one of you who does not have as good an imagination, if not a better one, than those people who produce the transcribed features, the network programs, the "canned" material which comes to your station. And, you have something more than anyone not a member of your immediate community - you know your neighbors, their needs, their wants. You are familiar with your listeners and their daily comings and goings. Advertising agencies would give millions of dollars to know the national audience as well as you know your local audience. Advertising agencies and network operators may think they know the national audience, but they hardly know their own.

For example, what advertising agency or network operator knows, or takes into consideration that most suburban communities around Chicago close all business

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Wednesday afternoons; and that most such communities keep their stores, banks and other shops open Friday evenings? And yet, certainly a Wednesday afternoon schedule and a Friday evening schedule on a community station should take those facts into consideration. One might analyze community by community, the differences between local and national behaviour. It is the opportunity of the local station to take advantage of those differences. There are few stations that rise above general mediocrity by programming for specific communities and audiences, but when you find one it stands out like the Palmolive Beacon; for there are differences in tastes - differences in likes and dislikes - there are communities where a Great Book program might go like wild-fire, and others where anything above the level of Black Beauty would be lost.

There are communities in which okra is considered a great delicacy and others where the mention of okra is enough to turn off every set in town. There are communities where the music audience does not rise above "Buttons and Bows", and others where anything less than Opus 151 by Beethoven is considered as suitable for five-finger exercises.

Those are the differences you and your local program director or station manager know better than anyone else in the world. Now, you're not going to discover these differences, or let me say those distinctive features of your community by sitting at a desk in a continuity office. You're going to have to meet people face to face and talk with them. You're going to have to take part in your community activities. And perhaps, here the woman broadcaster has the edge on us men. When men get together we talk about the weather, the state of business, perhaps tell a story or two, and criticize or praise what Washington (probably the FCC) has done recently. You women broadcasters know the other side of the picture far better than I do; but I'll wager that a good woman broadcaster can come back to the office with more local information from the Ladies Aid session than her boss ever brings back from the Kiwanis luncheon!

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Your station might well reconsider its program structure in the terms of local programming. And it would be strange if I, as President of the Association for Education by Radio did not mention that in my opinion one of the neglected but sorely needed local programs is an educational one... educational, not in the sense of a public service sustainer, but a program or series of programs done in cooperation with your local school system. In the past year or eighteen months the interest in educational circles in radio has increased by leaps and bounds. For the first time in years school boards have actually spent money for radio receivers - Atlanta, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, the rural schools of Wisconsin - all have bought AM-FM receivers.

During the past few weeks mail from 19 different states has come to my desk and each letter asks the same question: "How can our schools get started in radio? How can we make use of this medium in education?" It isn't a difficult question to answer, and we answer it in almost every case by saying, "Go to your local station; discuss your plans, your hopes, your needs with the local station manager." I think after this meeting we'll change that phrase to read "with the local woman broadcaster." For you as women broadcasters are again in an enviable position to be of genuine service to your community through educational broadcasting. There is a need for it; there are those in almost every school system who will help you on the educational problems if you will only help them with the radio problems.

And need this program be strictly a sustainer? Not at all! A program that is having tremendous influence on reading by young children in the Chicago area, truly a good educational broadcast, is sponsored by one of our large department stores; in one large city, not too far from Chicago, all school broadcasts are sponsored; here in Chicago, two stations have sold sponsored commercial announcements ahead of and following school broadcasts for a number of years.

The policy depends upon the local station and the local school board. Theoretically, we feel that programs designed for in-school listening for use in the classroom, should be unsponsored, when they are prepared and produced by the schools themselves; but your schools, I am sure, will cooperate with a local sponsor if he is of the calibre with which your station will do business.

I could go on ... the Parent-Teacher Association in your community, the Association of University Women, the Radio Listeners' Councils - why ignore them? Why alienate your audience? I find such groups intensely interested in radio, dimly conscious of radio's social force, and unaware of what to do about it. They seek guidance and understanding - they do not know the broadcasters' problems - YOU at times are at a loss to understand their problems. The woman broadcaster is in a position to act as liaison between your station and such groups. You cannot expect a love-feast on the occasion of one meeting, but through cooperation and understanding mutual respect will grow. Join with them; do their public service broadcasts, remembering always to keep them in the realm of public service and not just "axe-grinding". You will be performing not only a public service of definite value to your community, but you will be cementing relationships between your audience and your station that partake almost of loyalty. Is that valuable?

I know many of you have been expecting quite a different kind of talk today; you have been expecting me to spend my ten or fifteen minutes on TELEVISION, the CHALLENGE of tomorrow, in capital letters. I am sorry to have disappointed you; but, except for large communities, television isn't going to be much of a challenge to most of us for some time to come, if ever. Some figures seem to show that 40% of the nation will, under present arrangements, never have television. There are those who think that television will, in the next few years, kill radio.

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I have seen it predicted somewhere that there will be only two nationwide networks in radio. I should hate to think this to be true. Some of us wonder if radio as a medium of communication - yes, as an art medium - has ever been given a fair trial. Most of us broadcasters are excellent craftsmen, but the artists in the medium are few and far between.

We in education have been doing a lot of thinking about television. We have done many programs of an experimental nature, attempting to formulate some conclusions about the medium. Radio can do a better job of selling (either ideas or products) in many instances than can television. In too many instances the medium of television gets in the way of the content of the telecast. A coffee manufacturer is primarily interested in building up a pleasant reaction in the mind of his listener, a reaction which will motivate the listener or viewer to go out and buy his brand of coffee. A good announcer, given the proper words to say, can build a picture in the imagination of his listeners of that cup of coffee which no television camera can ever do.

The distinction is this: in television, we are always on the outside, looking in at something. In radio, we become an active participant in the commercial (or whatever we hear); we become personally involved in it. A few weeks ago a newspaper and radio station was mobbed and burned in Quito, Ecuador because of a broadcast of an Orson Welles type of Martian invasion. Why did the populace react as they did? Because they unreasoningly accepted the words of the radio drama as truth, as personally applicable to them; and, their imaginations conjured up far greater horrors than even those described by the narrator. Can you imagine the same thing happening had the broadcast been televised? I doubt it. The visual is always controlled by reason - we accept emotionally what we hear.

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Radio has been successful - probably the greatest advertising medium the world will ever know, and perhaps the greatest educational medium as well - because its approach has been emotional and imaginative. Someone recently remarked that he thought radio was here to stay, until television could build a better set for Bulldog Drummond's activities than his imagination. I am inclined to think that our radio listeners can still imagine a better cup of coffee than television will ever be able to brew. The point of all this is: DON'T SELL YOUR PRESENT MEDIUM SHORT!

I do not know who said it, but it might well have been said: "The past is always the champion - the future is always the challenger." The challenge in the radio industry (and believe me, the challenges are far more numerous than I have indicated) is not alone to the woman broadcaster, but certainly the woman broadcaster is in a position to accept the challenge of the future - she is bright-eyed, forthright, imaginative without being visionary; she is and can be a greater power in her station and her community, if she but respect her medium, her audience, and above all herself as a very important person in this business of broadcasting.

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M A R C H 12th, 1949

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Scanned from the National Association of Educational Broadcasters Records
at the Wisconsin Historical Society as part of
"Unlocking the Airwaves: Revitalizing an Early Public and Educational Radio Collection."



A collaboration among the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities,
University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Communication Arts,
and Wisconsin Historical Society.

Supported by a Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant from
the National Endowment for the Humanities



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